



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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HUNTING, FISHING PROGRAMS PROPOSED BY U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE FOR 20 NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing to authorize new hunting or fishing programs on 20 national wildlife refuges.

The proposal, published in the May 16, 1985, Federal Register, lists 14 refuges for which sport fishing programs are proposed and seven refuges for which migratory game bird, upland game, or big game hunting programs are proposed. Some of the refuges are already open to hunting and/or fishing and this proposal would merely add a different type of hunting or fishing program. Hunting or fishing programs are being proposed on other refuges for the first time.

The Refuge Administration Act and the Refuge Recreation Act authorize the Secretary of the Interior to permit hunting and fishing on refuges if these uses are compatible with the major purposes for which the refuge was established. The proposed hunting and fishing programs also must comply with provisions of the Endangered Species Act (where applicable) and the National Environmental Policy Act. Opening refuges to hunting and fishing requires publication of both a proposed rule and a final rule in the Federal Register.

The hunting and fishing programs proposed in this rulemaking have been found to be in accord with refuge purposes and will afford the general public greater opportunities for these recreational pursuits. In certain cases, additional regulations specific to individual refuges are proposed to ensure the compatibility of the hunting or fishing program with refuge purposes. These regulations may cover which species are harvested, in what manner, and when and where they may be taken.

A brief summary of the proposed hunting or fishing programs follows:

Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge (Virginia): A big game hunt program is proposed. The refuge's white-tailed deer population has exceeded the area's carrying capacity, leading to habitat destruction and a documented parasite problem in the deer herd. A feral hog hunt is also being proposed.

Bogue Chitto National Wildlife Refuge (Mississippi portion): The Service is proposing to open this recently acquired area to migratory bird, upland game, and big game hunting. The Louisiana portion of the refuge is already open to these activities.

Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge (Alabama): Sport fishing is proposed on two small freshwater lakes. However, use of boats with gas-powered motors would be prohibited on these waters.

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Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge (Arizona): The Service proposes to open this refuge to strictly controlled migratory bird, upland game, and big game hunting. The refuge was acquired recently to provide protected habitat for the endangered masked bobwhite quail. The bottomland masked bobwhite quail habitat has been closed to quail hunting for several years by the State of Arizona. Other types of hunting were allowed by the former landowners and the Service proposes to continue this arrangement until a master plan is completed for the refuge. Under the Service's proposal, all quail hunting will be prohibited on the 50,000 acres of bottomland grasslands habitat where endangered masked bobwhite quail will be reintroduced. The closed area will be posted and hunter education, law enforcement, and population monitoring will be conducted.

Buffalo Lake National Wildlife Refuge (Texas): The Service proposes to open the refuge to upland game hunting, but restricting the program to the hunting of pheasants, and a refuge permit system would limit the number of hunters on the refuge.

Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuge (Florida): Sport fishing has traditionally taken place in State-controlled waters surrounding the refuge. The proposal would open the refuge to sport fishing from refuge beaches into surrounding waters during daylight hours only.

Columbian White-tailed Deer National Wildlife Refuge (Washington): This refuge was established in 1972 as critical habitat for the endangered deer species. It has been determined that the large numbers of Roosevelt elk on the refuge are adversely impacting the deer herd. An elk control program involving trapping, transplanting, fencing, and off-refuge hunting is to be undertaken. The proposed big game hunt would be implemented only if these other control methods fail to achieve the desired elk herd size. The proposal also contains a sport fishing program on a limited area of the refuge.

Egmont Key National Wildlife Refuge (Florida): A sport fishing proposal, the action would permit fishing from refuge beaches into surrounding waters during daylight hours only.

Harbor Island National Wildlife Refuge (Michigan): This island refuge established last year can be reached only by boat. Hunting occurred regularly before the area was established as a refuge. Migratory bird, upland game, and big game hunting are being proposed. The Service believes hunting will help preserve the habitat by maintaining wildlife populations within the carrying capacity of the island.

Harris Neck National Wildlife Refuge (Georgia): Another traditional fishing area, the proposal would permit bank fishing from refuge lands into tidal waters during daylight hours.

Hobe Sound National Wildlife Refuge (Florida): This refuge was established to provide beach nesting habitat for marine turtles. The proposal would allow sport fishing by a limited number of people from designated beach areas during daylight hours only. Turtles nest only at night so they would not be affected by the fishing activity.

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Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge (Florida): A sport fishing program is proposed. It would allow bank fishing into interior refuge waters only. Fishing would not be permitted during the conduct of hunts on the refuge.

Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge (Florida): The proposed program would permit fishing from designated areas on the island during daylight hours into surrounding waters. The public would continue to be prohibited from portions of the refuge used by colonial nesting birds.

Pinckney Island National Wildlife Refuge (South Carolina): A proposed fishing program would permit fishing only from boats in the refuge's tidal creeks in accordance with South Carolina fishing regulations.

Pinellas National Wildlife Refuge (Florida): The proposed program would permit fishing from boats in waters surrounding the Tarpon Key portion of the refuge. To protect the refuge's colonial nesting birds, no fishing would be allowed from refuge shores.

Tybee National Wildlife Refuge (Georgia): Bank fishing from refuge lands into surrounding waters during daylight hours is being proposed.

Union Slough National Wildlife Refuge (Iowa): The Service is proposing to open portions of the refuge to migratory bird, upland game, and big game hunting. Hunting would be allowed only on the Buffalo Creek and Schwob units, which are soon to be transferred to the Service from the Iowa Conservation Commission. In the past, the State has allowed hunting on these areas.

Wassaw National Wildlife Refuge (Georgia): The proposed program on this coastal Georgia refuge would permit bank fishing from refuge lands in surrounding waters during daylight hours only.

Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge (Alabama): A sport fishing program is proposed. Certain areas will be limited to handicapped anglers.

Wolf Island National Wildlife Refuge (Georgia): The proposed fishing program would permit bank fishing from refuge lands into surrounding waters, and fishing from boats in the waters of two creeks on the refuge.

The Service believes these proposed hunting and fishing programs are appropriate incidental or secondary uses of refuge lands that will not interfere with, and in some cases will enhance, the primary purposes for which the refuges were established. The proposals are considered by the Service to be biologically sound and compatible with the principles of wildlife management. The Service also feels these programs serve the public interest by providing needed recreational opportunities without impairment of the resource.

Interested parties wishing information on a specific proposal or to make their views known may address their comments in writing to: Associate Director-- Wildlife Resources, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 18th & C Streets, N.W., Room 3252, Washington, D.C. 20240. Comments must be received by June 17, 1985.